

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132835
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	319319
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Steve Isherwood HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Emmanuel Gribben
Headteacher	Mrs Emma Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2007
School address	Todholes Road Cleator Moor Cumbria CA25 5DG
Telephone number	01946 855011
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

When St Patrick's was last inspected in May 2007, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress. The re-inspection was carried out by this inspector and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school, situated close to the centre of Cleator Moor in Cumbria. Pupils are drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds and the vast majority are of White British Heritage with a small number from minority ethnic groups. The area served by the school is semi-rural with some economic and social disadvantage. A higher proportion of pupils than normal are entitled to a free school meal and a smaller than average percentage has a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Since September 2007, under a new headteacher, the school has made rapid and sustained progress and according to many people, is unrecognisable from what it was like when its effectiveness was judged to be inadequate at the previous inspection. Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that it now provides a good and improving education for its pupils and has some outstanding features. Pupils are making much better progress than previously, standards are rising and the quality of teaching and learning has significantly improved. This is because of the outstanding leadership of the headteacher who has successfully orchestrated a remarkable recovery in the school's fortunes over the last year. She has been very well supported by the drive and commitment of senior leaders and the local authority adviser to get the school back on track. Since her appointment, she has provided strong and purposeful leadership and has gained the support and confidence of staff and governors. The impact of her high quality work lies behind all aspects of the school's improvement. She has provided a strong direction for all teachers and empowered them to act more decisively in all aspects of their work. In doing so she has generated a strong momentum for improvement, led by example and maximised the potential of all staff. As a result, the pace of change has accelerated, staff have been redeployed within the school and significant steps have been taken to prioritise actions and eliminate inadequate teaching. Expectations have been raised, morale is good and teamwork is strong. There is an excellent awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and where further improvement can be made.

Parents have picked up on the fact that the school is rapidly improving and can see the results from the many measures put into place to improve the education provided. Parents' who returned questionnaires overwhelmingly endorse this view. One parent's view was typical of many: 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds over the last year, encouragement is in abundance and I am proud she attends the school'.

Pupils make exceptionally good progress in their personal development. They behave very well and are caring and considerate towards each other. They always try their best and are keen to succeed. They enjoy school a great deal, which is demonstrated by their positive attitudes to learning and by their energy and enthusiasm for the wide range of opportunities that the school provides. Pupils feel safe and secure and are exceptionally well cared for. They have an excellent awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise and a balanced diet. Through the work of the school council they raise substantial funds for charities and make a positive difference to school life and the wider community. The school has a growing reputation and has forged outstanding partnerships with other schools and agencies.

Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who learn English as an additional language, now make good progress from the moment they enter the school. By the time they leave in Year 6, the proportion reaching the level expected at age 11 in English, mathematics and science is just above average. This represents good achievement considering their starting points. A significant factor in this improvement is that teaching is good overall with elements of outstanding practice. Furthermore, the curriculum is well planned with outstanding opportunities for enrichment and enjoyment. Pupils in all lessons are making faster progress than previously. This is because activities are providing increasing opportunities for

learners to test and deepen their understanding by taking responsibility for their work, applying their knowledge in different situations and sharing their ideas with others. Nevertheless, whilst improving, the school is very well aware that standards for the higher achieving pupils are not yet high enough. This is because the level of challenge in some lessons is variable which means that some pupils do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should. In the best lessons, new learning builds well on pupils' prior knowledge, the pace of learning is brisk and pupils are engrossed in their work.

The school has made outstanding progress since its previous inspection. As a result, and along with its other strengths, the school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good provision in the Foundation Stage gives children a good start and ensures that they achieve well. The warm and welcoming atmosphere provides a positive climate for learning where children feel safe and secure. Within a short period of time they settle quickly into a well structured environment where learning activities are targeted on key learning goals that match well their stages of development. Teaching is purposeful, questions challenge children's thinking and practical learning is supported by stimulating resources. For example, in one session children made good progress in their language development by discussing the contents of a treasure chest and a letter from 'Pirate Tom'. Elsewhere, children were encouraged to develop their understanding of rhyming words with carefully crafted discussion activities and the use of toys to stimulate interest. As one child said, 'You say one word and the other is similar'. Staff have high expectations, children are very well cared for. As a consequence, children show positive attitudes, become engrossed in their learning and have the confidence to choose activities for themselves.

Assessment is undertaken methodically and provides a clear picture of the actions needed to further advance children's learning. This means that by the start of Year 1, most children are achieving and exceeding the levels expected from them and have made good progress. Parents are kept well informed and are encouraged to become actively involved in their children's learning. Staff work well as a team and good links with Year 1 help to ensure continuity in learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate progress for more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and pupils' achievement is now good. Pupils' current work together with the school's own information shows that their progress is good and accelerating. Provisional data provided by the school for teacher assessments and national tests for 2008 indicate that most pupils are on course to reach nationally expected standards at age seven and 11 and numbers are increasing. This is because improved teaching and learning is increasing the progress pupils make in lessons.

Although children start school with a range of abilities, most enter the school with skills that are generally below those typically for their age. Recent improvements to the provision in the Foundation Stage ensure that children now make good progress. By the end of the Reception

year, most reach and often exceed the expected levels for their age. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2, where provision is also good. Although standards in 2007 at age seven were below average in all core subjects, teacher assessments for 2008 indicate signs of much stronger achievement. A notable success is that in reading over 90% of pupils made better than expected progress, during their time in Year 2.

Work in lessons and in their books shows that pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress as they move through the school to Year 6. Standards in all core subjects at the end of Year 6 are just above average as reflected in the latest test results for 2007. However, the progress that some of the more able pupils make is not yet rapid enough when their prior attainment is taken into account.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding and have a strong impact on their good progress. Pupils behave extremely well and are caring and considerate towards each other. They enjoy coming to school a great deal, have enormous respect for their teachers and are excited by the wide range of activities that the school provides. Attendance is satisfactory overall because a small number of families continue to take holidays during term time in spite of the best efforts by the school to improve attendance.

Throughout the school, a strong emphasis is placed on friendship and respect for one another. In assemblies, pupils think about relationships and the importance of giving and sharing with others. As a result, they grow into well rounded, thoughtful young people with clear values of honesty, tolerance and concern for others. As one child said when discussing people from different cultures; 'Their way of life might not be the same as ours but we are all the same inside'.

Pupils have an exceptionally good awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle by eating healthily and by taking regular exercise. Gaining the Activemark confirms the school's strong commitment to pupils' health and well-being.

Pupils recognise the needs of others and develop a strong social conscience. They try to make the community a better place by their high participation in local events and are proud to sing in church and for elderly residents. Their good progress in English, mathematics and science and in information and communication technology (ICT) equips them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with elements of outstanding provision in some classes. Effective use is made of assessment information in order to provide suitable tasks for all abilities. The school has worked hard to improve this aspect of its provision although it is aware of the need to further challenge the learning of higher ability pupils. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that activities are fun and briskly paced. There is a real sparkle and variety to learning. In addition, teachers know their subjects well and their infectious enthusiasm helps to motivate pupils to become fully engaged in their learning. Teachers have high expectations and ensure that pupils are challenged to make decisions about how they learn. This helps to

increase their confidence in tackling tasks independently. For example, in an outstanding lesson in Year 2, challenge and rigour were woven into the ongoing dialogue involving pupils and teacher. This led to them becoming completely engrossed in extending their mathematical problem solving skills in real life situations. Good use is made of teaching assistants particularly in the level of support they offer pupils who learn at a slower rate and those who learn English as an additional language, so that they progress at the same rate as their peers. A clear and consistent approach to the marking of pupils' work gives them a good understanding of what they need to do in order to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall and enrichment is outstanding. This contributes significantly to pupils' enthusiasm and their good progress. It is broad and balanced and flexibly planned, based on the assessment of previous work and pupils' previous learning. The curriculum is enhanced by the wide range of visits and visitors and very popular extra-curricular activities. When pupils train with sporting coaches or visit residential outdoor centres, a relevance and excitement are engendered which helps to extend their learning. Further enrichment is provided by the school's involvement in a national programme of curriculum development, particularly in the arts. Learning becomes irresistible when pupils work with artists, dancers, story tellers and musicians. This is extended even further when older pupils take part in a project involving popular music and drama, based on the importance of healthy lifestyles. There is a good focus on teaching the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. In the very near future the school is to extend the curriculum by increasing the use of these skills in other subjects. Strong links with other schools and outside agencies, including local businesses help to prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education and for the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school takes exceptionally good care of each child. All required checks, systems and procedures are in place to safeguard the pupils' well-being. Pupils and their families are well known and staff are vigilant and responsive to each individual. This helps to enhance feelings of safety and security. Careful attention is given to needs of vulnerable pupils and the school provides them with good personal support. The buddy system and friendship stops in the playground ensure that all pupils have somebody to play with and that no one is left on the sidelines. Opportunities for pupils to express opinions and make decisions are encouraged through circle time sessions and class council meetings.

There are strong links with the church and the school lies at the hub of the parish, reinforcing the sense of a closely knit community. Pupils with specific needs are well supported in school and through the involvement of outside agencies. Considerable improvements have been made to the assessment and tracking systems. This gives staff a good view of how well pupils are progressing and of any gaps in their learning. This means that staff are able to set precise, realistic targets for improvement which help pupils to know clearly what they need to do to move forward. This is helping to accelerate their rate of progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management and the outstanding leadership of the headteacher lie at the heart of the school's impressive recovery. Central to this rapid improvement is the school's rigorous monitoring of its performance and the systematic way in which self-evaluation is planned across the year. As a result, there is clear agreement on how the school can improve further and plans of good quality are in place to drive the school forward. Well structured monitoring draws on the expertise of senior staff and is leading to a clear evaluation of the impact of actions taken and the identification of the correct priorities to raise achievement further. For example, senior leaders are well aware of the need to quicken the pace of learning of more able pupils in some subjects and appropriate action is already underway.

The governing body plays a key role in shaping the school's direction and in holding it to account. Its members are extremely committed and offer good levels of support and challenge. They are confident in asking difficult questions and are involved in monitoring lessons and planning for improvement. They are further developing their skills in evaluating the school's performance with training and support and are adamant that the school will continue to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Cumbria, CA25 5DG

Thank you all very much for the friendly way in which you helped Mr Earley and myself when we inspected your school recently. We really enjoyed chatting to you in the playground, in your classrooms and in the interview with the school council. We decided that your school no longer requires special measures. We are pleased to tell you that your school has rapidly improved and is now giving you a good education. This is because Mrs Jackson and all the teachers have worked very hard to make sure that you make better progress than before.

You told us that your school is a happy and safe place to be. We agree. We were very pleased to see how well you behave and how you help one another in lessons and at playtime. We particularly liked the way you sang 'Here I am Lord' in assembly. We could see from your faces that you really enjoyed singing this song. We were also impressed by the confident way in which the three boys called 'The Sharing Trio' sang to us all at the end.

You told us that you enjoy your work and that your teachers help you to learn well by making your lessons interesting and often fun. We could see this with our own eyes when those of you in Year 2 were solving real life problems in division, when pupils in Year 3 were recognising different features of advertisements and when those of you in Year 6 were investigating the different numbers of orders there are when you line up for assembly. We were delighted to see the 'Wicked Production' by Year 6. You made the hairs on the back of my neck stand out and we were both very moved by your performance.

Mrs Jackson and all the staff work very hard to make the school as good as it can be and we are confident that it will continue to improve. To help with this, we have asked them to ensure that more of you reach the higher levels in your work. You can help by telling your teachers what makes your lessons interesting and what helps you to learn.

You are a credit to your mums and dads and carers. We can see why your teachers enjoy working with you every day. Keep trying hard. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood David Earley

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools Additional Inspector